

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 94 OF 104

Cut Without Hands

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Ezekiel 46–48; Daniel 1–2
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 141–143
Gospels	John 11:1–27
General New Testament	3 John–Jude

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class from what people build to what God builds. Empires of gold and iron come apart under a stone nobody cut. A river no engineer designed heals a sea that has been dead since Abraham. A man who has been dead four days hears a voice. A faith that no committee developed was delivered once and is complete. Everything these readings celebrate has one thing in common: no human hand made it, and no human hand can stop it.

Doctrinally, Daniel 2 carries the weight, and it may be the single most important chapter you teach all year. The kingdom was set up in the days of the Roman kings, at Pentecost, and Christ reigns now over His church. Refuse any interpretation that postpones the kingdom to an earthly future reign. Alongside that, finish Ezekiel's vision as you began it, symbolically, letting the river and the name of the city make the case. And use Jude 3 to settle the question of whether God is still revealing new things: the faith was delivered once, for all.

Formationally, the thread is settled resolve. Daniel purposed in his heart before the food arrived. Thomas went to Judea knowing what waited there. Gaius kept receiving strangers who could never repay him. Jude told frightened Christians to contend rather than retreat. Ask your class this question directly: name the one decision you keep making under pressure, in the moment, that you have never settled in advance, and say out loud what you are deciding now, before the moment comes again.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Ezekiel 46–48 and Daniel 1–2, and give at least half the hour to Daniel 2. Read the vision of the river quickly and let the closing name of the city land, then work carefully through the four kingdoms and the stone, ending at Acts 2. This is the week's essential class.

Second session: Take up 3 John and Jude together; they are short enough to read aloud in full. Spend the first part on the three men of 3 John and the rest on Jude 3 and Jude 20–25, so the class leaves with both the charge to contend and the instructions for keeping themselves.

The other two readings: Commend John 11:1–27 warmly and tell the class to stop at Martha's confession and sit with it, since the miracle itself comes next week. For the Psalms, point them to Psalm 141:3 and Psalm 143:8 as two prayers short enough to memorize and use every day this week.

The River and the Stone

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Ezekiel ends where the whole vision has been heading. Water begins as a trickle under the threshold of the house and grows, without any tributary feeding it, until it is a river that must be swum. Everything it reaches lives. Trees on both banks bear fruit every month and their leaves do not wither. Even the Dead Sea, the deadest water on earth, is healed. Then the land is apportioned, resident foreigners are given an inheritance among the tribes, and the book closes with a name for the city: The Lord Is There. Those three words are the point of the last nine chapters.

Daniel opens about thirty years earlier, in 605 B.C., with the first deportation. Four young men of noble family are selected for three years of training in the language and literature of the Chaldeans, given new names honoring Babylonian gods, and assigned a daily ration from the king's own table. Daniel purposes in his heart not to defile himself, asks respectfully, proposes a ten day test, and at the end of the training God has given the four of them knowledge and skill beyond every wise man in the realm.

Chapter 2 is the doctrinal anchor of the entire book and one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament for a Christian. Nebuchadnezzar demands that his wise men tell him both the dream and its meaning. Daniel asks for time, prays with his friends, receives the secret, and refuses any credit for it. The statue is four kingdoms of descending value and increasing hardness. Then a stone is cut out without hands, strikes the image at its feet, grinds the whole thing to chaff, and becomes a mountain filling the earth. Verse 44 dates it: in the days of those kings.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Ezekiel's closing vision is dated about 573 B.C., while Daniel was taken to Babylon in the first deportation of 605 B.C. The two men are contemporaries in exile, one preaching by a canal and the other serving in the palace.
- Daniel is written in two languages. Chapters 2:4 through 7:28 are in Aramaic, the international language of the Gentile world, and those chapters deal with Gentile empires; the rest is in Hebrew.
- The book has two halves: court narratives about faithfulness under pagan rule (chapters 1–6) and visions about the rise and fall of kingdoms (chapters 7–12).
- The four kingdoms are identified within Scripture itself: Babylon (2:37–38), Medo-Persia (5:28; 8:20), Greece (8:21), and by historical sequence, Rome.
- Jesus treats Daniel as a genuine prophet and quotes him (Matthew 24:15), and the phrase “Son of Man” that Jesus uses of Himself comes from Daniel 7.
- The defilement of the king's food likely involved meat offered to idols and violations of the Law's food restrictions, along with the symbolism of eating at a pagan king's table.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ezekiel 47:1–12 begins with water trickling under a threshold and ends with a river nobody can cross. Follow the man with the measuring line through the four measurements, and discuss what this picture claims about whatever flows out from where God dwells.*

Walk the class through the measurements deliberately: a thousand cubits and it is ankle deep, another thousand and it is to the knees, another thousand and it is to the waist, another thousand and it cannot be passed. No stream joins it. It simply grows, and everything it touches lives. The river runs east toward the Arabah and into the sea, and the water that has killed everything for millennia is healed, with fishermen standing on its banks.

The picture is life proceeding from God's presence and spreading beyond anything a person could have predicted from its beginning. Jesus uses the same image of rivers of living water flowing out of a believer (John 7:37–39),

and Revelation 22:1–2 puts the river and the healing trees in the final vision. Ask your class where they have watched something start as a trickle, one conversation or one family, and become a river. Then ask what they are dismissing right now because it looks small.

Question 2. *Daniel 2:44 says God would set up a kingdom “in the days of these kings” that would never be destroyed. Work out from the dream itself which kings are in view, and discuss what that timing settles and what it rules out.*

Let the class do the work from the text. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar, “You are this head of gold” (2:38), so the first kingdom is Babylon. Daniel 5:28 announces that the kingdom is given to the Medes and Persians, so the second is Medo-Persia. Daniel 8:20–21 names the ram as Media and Persia and the male goat as Greece, so the third is Greece. The fourth, strong as iron and eventually divided and mixed, is Rome, in whose days the events actually fall.

Then read 2:44 slowly: “In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” Not after they are gone. In their days. That settles the date. Jesus said some standing there would not taste death until they saw the kingdom come with power (Mark 9:1). Acts 2 records that coming, and Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been conveyed into it. What it rules out is any scheme that leaves the kingdom unestablished and waiting on a future revived empire or an earthly political reign. The stone has already struck, and the mountain is already growing.

Question 3. *Daniel 1:8 says he purposed in his heart before the king’s food was ever set in front of him. Which decision are you currently making in the moment, over and over, that you should have settled once in advance?*

Notice the order in Daniel 1:8. He purposed first. The decision was made before the pressure arrived, before the food was on the table, before anyone looked at him to see what he would do. That is why he could ask so calmly and so respectfully; he was not deciding, he was explaining a decision already made. Anyone who has tried to make a hard call in the middle of the moment knows the difference.

Push the class to name the recurring decision. It is usually one of a few: what happens when the drinks are poured, what happens when the conversation turns to gossip, what happens when the screen is in front of you at eleven at night, what happens when the boss asks you to shade a number. Ask each person to write down the decision and the sentence he will use. Daniel had a sentence ready, and he had an alternative to propose.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the four metals of Daniel 2:31–45 and the kingdoms they represent. Use Daniel 2:37–38, 5:28, and 8:20–21 to identify the first three by name from Scripture rather than from a chart.*

Gold is Babylon, named outright in 2:38. Silver is Medo-Persia, identified when the writing on the wall is interpreted in 5:28 and again when the two horned ram is named in 8:20. Bronze is Greece, named as the male goat in 8:21. Iron, and then iron mixed with clay, is Rome, strong, crushing, and eventually divided and brittle. Scripture names three of the four for us, and history supplies the fourth without any guesswork.

2. *Read Daniel 2:44 alongside Mark 9:1, Acts 2:1–4, and Colossians 1:13. When was the kingdom established, where is its King now, and who is already in it?*

The kingdom was established in the days of the Roman emperors, at Pentecost, in Acts 2. Mark 9:1 promised that some of Jesus’ hearers would live to see it come with power; Acts 1:8 and 2:1–4 record the power arriving; Acts 2:47 has the Lord adding the saved to the church daily. Colossians 1:13 says believers have already been delivered from darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. The King is on His throne now (Acts 2:33–36; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25).

3. *Ezekiel 48:35 gives the city a name: The Lord Is There. Compare Revelation 21:3 and 22:1–2, and list the images the two visions have in common.*

Both visions have water flowing from God’s presence, trees bearing fruit whose leaves bring healing, a city laid out with gates named for the tribes, and above all the presence of God with His people as the final word. Ezekiel ends, The Lord Is There. Revelation 21:3 says the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them. The last

chapter of the Old Testament prophets and the last chapters of the New Testament are describing the same hope in the same images.

4. *List everything that happens to what the river touches in Ezekiel 47:7–12. Why does it matter that even the salt sea is healed and that the leaves do not wither?*

The waters go down into the sea and are healed; there is a very great multitude of fish, of many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea; fishermen spread nets from En Gedi to En Eglaim; the marshes are left salty for salt; and trees on both banks bear fresh fruit every month because the water flows from the sanctuary, with leaves for medicine. The healing of the salt sea matters because that was the one body of water everyone knew nothing could live in. The vision says the life that comes from God reaches even there.

5. *Daniel's resolve cost him the easy path in a place where nobody back home would ever have known. Name one small compromise that everyone around you accepts, and decide now, in advance, what you will do the next time it is offered.*

Answers will vary. Look for the ordinary and the invisible: expense reports, what gets said about a coworker after he leaves the room, how honest the tax return is, what is watched alone. Daniel's test was not dramatic and no one at home would ever have heard about it, which is exactly what made it a test of the heart rather than of reputation.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Finish the temple vision the way you started it. The river that grows without tributaries and heals the Dead Sea is plainly symbolic, and it is the best evidence in the vision for how the whole of chapters 40 through 48 should be read: God's restored presence among His people, fulfilled in Christ and His church.
- Daniel 2:44 is the foundational kingdom text, and it must not be surrendered. The kingdom was established in the days of the Roman kings, at Pentecost, and Christ reigns now. Refuse any interpretation that postpones the kingdom to a future earthly reign, or that inserts a gap of two thousand years into a dream that does not have one.
- Daniel 1 is not a diet plan, and the passage says nothing about vegetables being healthier. The issue is defilement and loyalty, not nutrition. God gave these four their appearance and their wisdom (1:9, 15, 17).
- Do not let the class turn the four kingdoms into a map of modern nations or a timeline for current events. Daniel's point in chapter 2 is that God raises up and removes kings and that His kingdom outlasts all of them.

Prayers Under Pressure

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These three psalms belong to David's years of being hunted, and they are prayers of a man who knows that the danger outside is not his worst problem. Psalm 141 is an evening prayer, with incense rising and hands lifted. What David asks for first is not rescue but restraint: guard my mouth, do not incline my heart to any evil thing, do not let me eat of the delicacies of wicked men. He knows that the fastest way to be ruined by his enemies is to become like them.

Psalm 142 is raw and short. Its heading says it was written in the cave, which puts us either in Adullam or in En Gedi, hiding from a king with an army. David says his spirit is overwhelmed, that there is no one who acknowledges him, that refuge has failed him, and that no one cares for his soul. Then he says, "You are my refuge." He does not talk himself out of the feeling; he takes the feeling to the only one left.

Psalm 143 is traditionally counted among the penitential psalms, and verse 2 is why. David asks God not to enter into judgment with him, because in God's sight no living person is righteous. That is a man who has stopped arguing his case on merit. What follows is a string of morning prayers: cause me to hear, cause me to know, teach me, revive me. The psalm ends still surrounded by enemies and still asking, which is honest and worth pointing out.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- All three psalms are ascribed to David; Psalm 142 carries the additional note that it was written when he was in the cave, connecting it with the years of flight from Saul.
- Psalm 141 and 142 are individual laments; Psalm 143 is a lament with strong penitential elements and is counted among the seven penitential psalms in older tradition.
- Incense and the evening sacrifice in 141:2 refer to the daily tabernacle ritual of the Law of Moses, which framed the rhythm of Israel's day.
- The caves of Adullam and En Gedi were real hideouts in the Judean wilderness, and 1 Samuel 22 and 24 supply the narrative background a class will find useful.
- Both 141 and 143 end by asking God to deal with enemies, which places them at the milder end of the imprecatory range.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 141:3 asks God to set a guard over the door of his lips. Why would a man pray about his speech rather than simply resolve to be more careful, and where would that prayer have changed your last seven days?*

Because David knows something about himself that resolutions never fix. Anyone can decide in the morning to watch his tongue and still hear himself at three in the afternoon. James says no man can tame the tongue (James 3:8), which is not an excuse but a diagnosis. Praying about speech is an admission that the problem runs deeper than effort, and it enlists help before the conversation starts rather than apologizing after it ends.

Notice the order of 141:3 and 141:4. First the mouth, then the heart, because David understands that words come out of what is already in there (Matthew 12:34). Ask for specifics from the past week: the text sent in anger, the joke at a coworker's expense, the exaggerated story, the complaint in front of the children. Then ask what praying this verse before those moments would have required, which is usually only that they pray at all.

Question 2. *Psalm 141:5 calls the striking of a righteous man a kindness and oil on the head. Who has standing to do that in your life, and what happened the last time somebody actually used it?*

The verse is remarkable. David treats a righteous man's rebuke not as an insult to be survived but as a gift to be received, oil that refreshes the head rather than breaks it. Proverbs says the same repeatedly: faithful are the wounds of a friend (Proverbs 27:6), and rebuke a wise man and he will love you (Proverbs 9:8). The measure of maturity is not whether you are ever corrected but what you do in the twenty minutes afterward.

Then ask the harder question: who actually has that permission with them? Many adults have carefully arranged their lives so that no one does. They have a spouse who has learned not to bring it up, friends who only affirm, and a congregation where they are known but not close to anyone. Ask each person to name one person, and if he cannot, to consider that the gap is the point of the verse.

Question 3. *Psalm 143:2 asks God not to bring His servant into judgment, since no one living is righteous in His sight. How does an honest man pray that and still ask God to vindicate him, and what does that combination teach us about prayer?*

David is not being inconsistent; he is distinguishing two things. When he pleads his integrity elsewhere, he is answering a specific false charge: I did not do the thing they accuse me of. When he says no one living is righteous before God, he is speaking about standing before God on the basis of a flawless record, and he knows better than to ask for that. He asks instead on the ground of God's mercy, God's faithfulness, and God's righteousness (143:1, 11).

That combination is what honest prayer looks like. A Christian can ask God to vindicate him against a lie at work and in the same breath confess that he has no claim on God except mercy. Paul says the same in Romans 3: all have sinned, and justification is a gift through the redemption in Christ. Ask the class which half they tend to drop, the honesty about sin or the confidence to ask for help, and why.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *The title of Psalm 142 places David in a cave. Read 1 Samuel 22:1–2 and 24:1–7, and note carefully what David had, and what he did not have, when he prayed this.*

David had about four hundred men with him, everyone in distress, in debt, or discontented, and he had a clear chance to kill Saul and end the whole ordeal in one stroke. What he did not have was a home, a throne he had been promised years earlier, safety, or anyone who could actually do anything about his situation. Psalm 142 says no one cares for his soul while he is surrounded by four hundred followers, which tells you something about how loneliness works.

2. *List every request David makes in Psalm 143. Count how many concern his circumstances and how many concern his own heart, and see which list is longer.*

The requests include: hear my prayer, answer me, do not enter into judgment with me, answer me speedily, do not hide Your face, cause me to hear Your lovingkindness, cause me to know the way I should walk, deliver me from my enemies, teach me to do Your will, revive me, bring my soul out of trouble, and cut off my enemies. Roughly half concern his inner life and his obedience rather than his circumstances, which is unusual for a man being hunted and worth saying out loud.

3. *Psalm 143:2 says no one living is righteous before God. Read Romans 3:20–24, and write down how Paul answers the exact problem David names.*

Paul says by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Then he gives the answer David could only reach toward: a righteousness of God apart from law, through faith in Jesus Christ, with all having sinned and being justified freely by His grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus. David names the problem; the gospel names the remedy.

4. *Psalm 141:2 asks that prayer rise like incense and lifted hands be as the evening sacrifice. Read Revelation 5:8 and Hebrews 13:15, and describe what sacrifice has become for a Christian.*

Revelation 5:8 pictures the prayers of the saints as golden bowls of incense before the throne, and Hebrews 13:15 calls praise a sacrifice, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. Under the Law, sacrifice was an animal and incense was a compound burned at set hours. Under Christ, the one sacrifice for sins has been offered (Hebrews 10:12), and what we bring is praise, thanksgiving, doing good, and sharing (Hebrews 13:15–16), along with our own bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1).

5. *Psalm 143:8 asks to hear God's lovingkindness in the morning. Set your alarm ten minutes early for the next six days, read one psalm before anything else touches your eyes, and write one sentence each day about what you heard.*

Answers will vary. Ask the following week who actually did it and what changed, since a six day experiment is short enough that most people will try it. Listen for the effect on the rest of the day rather than for spiritual sounding reports; David's request in 143:8 is immediately followed by, "cause me to know the way in which I should walk," which is a request about the next sixteen hours.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 143:2 says no one living is righteous before God, and it means that every accountable person has actually sinned (Romans 3:23). Do not let it be used to teach total depravity or inherited guilt. Guilt is personal and comes by one's own sin (Ezekiel 18:20), and children are not born guilty (Matthew 18:3; 19:14).
- The requests against enemies at the end of 141 and 143 are mild as imprecations go, but the principle still holds: these are appeals to God's justice, not licenses for personal revenge (Romans 12:19).
- Psalm 142 gives permission to say out loud that one feels alone, and that permission is pastorally valuable. Do not let it become an endorsement of self pity. David says no one cares for his soul, and then tells God, "You are my refuge."
- The incense and evening sacrifice of 141:2 belong to the Law of Moses. If a question arises about worship practice, answer briefly from Hebrews 10 and 13 and keep the hour with the psalms.

I Am the Resurrection

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

John builds this chapter slowly on purpose. The sisters send a message that is a model of restraint: “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.” No request, just the fact. Jesus responds with a statement that must have sounded like reassurance, that this sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God, and then He stays where He is for two more days. Lazarus dies. Everything about the timing is deliberate, and John wants the reader to feel the two days.

The middle section is about the disciples, and it is grimmer than we usually remember. Judea meant stones; the last trip had nearly ended in an execution. Jesus speaks about walking in the day and about Lazarus sleeping, they misunderstand, and then He says it plainly: Lazarus is dead, and He is glad He was not there, for their sakes. Thomas, who usually gets remembered for doubt, says let us go and die with Him. It is a bleak sentence and a brave one.

Then comes the exchange with Martha. Her opening line has clearly been said a hundred times that week: if You had been here, my brother would not have died. Jesus tells her that her brother will rise. She agrees, in the general, orthodox, future tense of every believing Jew: at the last day. And Jesus moves the resurrection out of the calendar and into Himself. “I am the resurrection and the life.” The question He asks her, “Do you believe this?”, is the question John is asking every reader.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is the seventh and climactic sign in John’s Gospel, and it is the event that pushes the Sanhedrin to decide on Jesus’ death (11:45–53).
- Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem (11:18), close enough that many mourners from the city had come out, which makes the sign highly public.
- Mary, Martha, and Lazarus appear also in Luke 10:38–42 and in John 12, so this is a household Jesus knew well and stayed in.
- Four days in the tomb is emphasized because it rules out any suggestion of a swoon or a hasty burial, and because popular belief held that hope of revival was gone by then.
- The reading stops at Martha’s confession, so the raising itself belongs to next week. Let the class sit with the claim before they see the miracle.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus waits two full days after hearing Lazarus is sick. Verse 5 says He loved the family, and verse 6 begins with the word “so.” How do you hold love and delay together, and where have you had to hold them together yourself?*

The word “so” in verse 6 is the hinge, and most readers skip it. John does not write that Jesus loved them but delayed; he writes that He loved them, so He stayed two more days. The delay is an expression of the love, not an exception to it. Jesus is arranging something better than the healing they asked for, and He is willing to let them grieve for four days to give it.

That is a hard comfort and should be offered gently. Most of the room has asked God for something urgent and heard nothing back. Do not tell them that every delay produces a Lazarus; John does not promise that. Do tell them that delay is not evidence of indifference, and that in this one case where we are shown the reason, the reason was love. Ask who is currently in the two days, and let the class pray for them by name.

Question 2. *Martha states her faith twice, in verses 22 and 24, and both times Jesus presses past it. Which difference is He driving at between believing a doctrine about resurrection and believing in a Person, and why will He not settle for the first?*

Martha believes correctly, and Jesus is not satisfied with correct. She says that even now God will give Him whatever He asks, which keeps Jesus in the role of a petitioner. She says her brother will rise at the last day, which keeps resurrection on a calendar somewhere in the future. Jesus answers both at once: I am the resurrection and the life. Resurrection is not primarily an event; it is a Person, and He is standing in front of her.

The distinction matters for the class because doctrinal agreement is the easiest thing in the world to mistake for faith. A person can affirm every article and still relate to God as a distant benefactor. Ask the class where they are holding a true belief at arm's length: they believe in forgiveness but have never felt forgiven, believe God provides but have never risked anything on it. Then let Jesus' question land as He asked it: do you believe this?

Question 3. *Thomas says, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (11:16). Is that faith, fatalism, or some of both, and what would loyalty like that actually cost in a life like yours?*

It is both, and that is what makes Thomas so recognizable. There is no expectation of success in his sentence; he assumes the trip will end badly. But he goes, and he calls the others to go, and he goes for one reason, which is that he will not be anywhere Jesus is not. That is loyalty without optimism, and it is a great deal more than most of us manage.

Ask what it costs in ordinary life. Loyalty of that kind looks like staying in a hard congregation, keeping a promise after the feeling is gone, continuing to teach a class nobody thanks you for, standing next to a brother whose reputation is damaged. Point out that Thomas is remembered for the one time he doubted and not for this. Faithfulness is usually recorded by God long before anyone notices it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Jesus says about the purpose of this sickness in 11:4 and 11:15. Who does He say the delay and the outcome are for?*

In 11:4 He says the sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it. In 11:15 He says He is glad for the disciples' sakes that He was not there, so that they may believe. So the purpose is the glory of God and the faith of those watching. Notice who is not listed as the primary beneficiary: Lazarus himself, who had to die, and the sisters, who had to grieve. God's purposes in our trials are often larger than our comfort.

2. *Compare what Martha says in 11:21 with what Mary says in 11:32. Which words are identical, and what does that tell you the two sisters had been saying to each other all week?*

Both say, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Word for word the same. That is the sentence that had been going around the house for four days, at the table, in the doorway, to every mourner who arrived. It is not accusation so much as grief looking for a place to stand. John records it twice so we hear the echo.

3. *Read John 11:25–26 alongside John 5:28–29 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. Which promise is Jesus making to Martha, and which promises is He not making?*

He promises that the one who believes in Him, though he may die, shall live, and that whoever lives and believes in Him shall never die. That is the promise of life in Him that death does not end. John 5:28–29 promises a general resurrection of all who are in the graves, some to life and some to condemnation, and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18 describes the Lord's coming and the raising of those who sleep in Jesus. What Jesus is not promising Martha is that believers avoid dying, or that Lazarus will never die again. Lazarus will die a second time.

4. *Trace what the disciples are worried about in 11:8–16 and how Jesus answers them. Why would John include their fear in the middle of a chapter about life?*

They are worried about being stoned, and reasonably so; the last visit to Judea ended with Jesus escaping from men holding rocks. Jesus answers with the image of walking in the daylight: there are twelve hours in the day, and a man who walks in them does not stumble. His work had an appointed span, and nothing would end it early. John includes

the fear because faith in this chapter is not the absence of fear. Thomas is afraid and goes anyway, and that is the shape most obedience takes.

5. Martha's confession in 11:27 is the exact confession John wrote his whole Gospel to produce (John 20:31). Say it out loud to God this week, then name one specific area of your life that has not yet caught up with it.

Answers will vary. The confession is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world. Listen for the honesty of the second half. A man may confess Christ as Lord and still run his finances, his calendar, and his temper as though the confession were about something else. Ask for one area and one step, and follow up on it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The raising of Lazarus, which the class will read next week, is a restoration to this present life, not the resurrection body of 1 Corinthians 15. Lazarus died again. Keep the two clearly distinct or the doctrine of the resurrection gets blurred.
- Do not use 11:4 to promise anyone that a particular illness will not end in death. Jesus is speaking about this case, and the outcome was still a funeral before it was a miracle.
- Martha's "resurrection at the last day" reflects the consistent teaching of Scripture: one general resurrection of the just and the unjust at the coming of Christ (John 5:28–29; Acts 24:15). Do not allow a scheme of multiple resurrections separated by an earthly reign.
- The language of sleep for death (11:11–14) is a common biblical figure for the body at rest and should not be pressed into a doctrine that the dead are unconscious. Luke 16:22–25 and Philippians 1:23 speak otherwise.

Once for All Delivered

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Third John is the most personal letter in the New Testament and the only one whose main subject is a man's ego. Gaius is commended because he receives traveling preachers who have gone out for the sake of the Name, taking nothing from the Gentiles, and John says that supporting such men makes us fellow workers for the truth. Then comes Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence. Notice that John does not accuse him of false doctrine. His sins are all relational: malicious words, refusing the brethren, hindering those who would receive them, and putting them out of the church.

Jude is short, furious, and carefully constructed. He tells us he had planned to write about our common salvation and changed course because certain men had crept in unnoticed, turning the grace of God into license and denying the Lord. He then lays down three examples of judgment on those who had once been delivered or once held position, three portraits from Cain, Balaam, and Korah, and a hail of images: clouds without water, trees twice dead, raging waves, wandering stars.

But Jude does not end in the wreckage. The last paragraph is where the letter is going: build yourselves up on your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, look for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Then, on some have compassion, and others save with fear. And finally one of the great doxologies in Scripture, to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling. The book that contends hardest also comforts hardest.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Third John is written by “the elder,” the apostle John, to a Christian named Gaius, probably in a congregation near Ephesus late in the first century.
- Traveling preachers depended on hospitality from Christians in each town, so receiving or refusing them was a matter of supporting or hindering the spread of the gospel (3 John 5–8).
- Jude identifies himself as a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, which makes him almost certainly a half brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55), writing perhaps in the sixties.
- Jude and 2 Peter 2 cover much of the same ground in much of the same language, which suggests a shared concern about the same kind of teachers.
- Jude 9 refers to a dispute over Moses' body and Jude 14 quotes a prophecy of Enoch. He is using material known to his readers; inspiration guarantees the truth of what he affirms, not the canonicity of anything he alludes to.
- The word “contend” in verse 3 is an athletic term, the strenuous effort of a contestant, and it is the only imperative in the opening.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Third John gives us three men in fourteen verses. Describe Gaius, Diotrephes, and Demetrius from what John actually says, and be honest about which of the three your own reputation currently resembles.*

Gaius is walking in truth, is generous to men he has never met, and is described as faithful in whatever he does for the brethren. Demetrius has a good testimony from everyone, from the truth itself, and from John. Diotrephes loves the preeminence, will not receive John, speaks maliciously against him, refuses the brethren, and expels those who want to receive them. Three men, one congregation, and a letter preserved for two thousand years.

Make the last part of the question personal without letting it become confession time. Most people are not Diotrephes, but many carry a smaller version of him: the man who has to be consulted, the woman whose opinion has to prevail, the member who withdraws support when things go a way he did not choose. Ask what it would

take for someone to be described as Gaius is described. The answer, in this letter, is hospitality and faithfulness to people who can do nothing for you.

Question 2. *Jude says the faith was “once for all delivered to the saints.” Which claims about God’s word does that phrase make, and what does it rule out for anyone who says God is still revealing new things?*

The phrase is a single Greek word meaning once for all, delivered one time with no need of repetition. Jude claims that the faith is a definite body of teaching, that it was handed over to the saints as a deposit rather than developed by them, and that the delivery is complete. That is why he can call Christians to contend for it; you cannot defend a boundary that is still being drawn.

What it rules out is continuing new revelation. If the faith was delivered once for all, then no later word can be added to it, whether by an angel (Galatians 1:8), a church council, a modern prophet, or a private impression. Say this plainly and graciously, and connect it to the sufficiency of Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:3. Then guard the other side: contending for the faith is not the same as being contentious, and Jude’s own closing verses are about compassion and rescue.

Question 3. *Jude 22–23 says to have compassion on some and to save others with fear, snatching them out of the fire. How do you tell which approach the person in front of you needs, and what makes that judgment so difficult?*

Jude assumes different people in different conditions. Some are wavering and need mercy, patience, and a hand; pressure would break them. Others are already close enough to the fire that gentleness would be cruelty, and someone has to say hard words quickly. Paul makes the same distinction when he tells the Thessalonians to warn the unruly, comfort the fainthearted, and uphold the weak (1 Thessalonians 5:14). One assignment, three treatments.

What makes it hard is that we usually pick our approach by temperament rather than by need. Some of us are constitutionally gentle and never say the urgent thing; others are constitutionally blunt and crush the person who needed patience. Ask the class which mistake they are prone to. Then note Jude’s closing phrase, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh: rescue people without flirting with what ruined them.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything 3 John says about Diotrephes and everything he does. Which one of his faults appears to be the root of all the others?*

He loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive John or the brethren, prates against them with malicious words, forbids those who wish to receive them, and puts them out of the church. The root is named first: he loves to be first. Everything else in the list is what a man does to protect a position. That is worth saying out loud, because the doctrinal error we watch for is usually easier to spot than the ambition that produces this kind of damage.

2. *Set 3 John 5–8 beside 2 John 10–11 from last week. Whom are Christians told to receive, whom are they told not to receive, and what exactly makes the difference?*

3 John says to receive traveling preachers who have gone out for the sake of the Name, and to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God; whoever does becomes a fellow worker for the truth. 2 John says not to receive into the house or greet a man who does not bring the doctrine of Christ; whoever does shares in his evil deeds. The difference is the message the man carries. Hospitality in both letters is treated as endorsement and support, so it follows the truth exactly.

3. *Jude 5–7 gives three examples of judgment. Read Numbers 14:26–35, 2 Peter 2:4, and Genesis 19:24–25, and state in one sentence the point Jude draws from all three together.*

Jude’s point is that being delivered, or being highly placed, guarantees nothing to those who abandon their position. Israel was brought out of Egypt and then destroyed in the wilderness for unbelief. Angels did not keep their proper domain and are reserved in chains. Sodom and Gomorrah went after strange flesh and are set forth as an example. Jude 5 is a plain statement that a people once saved out of Egypt were afterward destroyed, which is exactly why the letter urges Christians to keep themselves.

4. Jude 20–21 lists four things a Christian does to keep himself in the love of God. Write them out, and mark honestly which ones you are actually doing right now.

Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourselves in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Notice that keeping oneself in God's love is something the Christian does, and notice that verse 24 immediately credits God as the one who is able to keep us from stumbling. Both are true and neither cancels the other.

5. Jude says to snatch some out of the fire. Name one person you know who is drifting away from the Lord, decide when you will contact him this week, and write down the first sentence you intend to say.

Answers will vary. Push for a name, a day, and a first sentence, because the first sentence is where most people freeze. Good first sentences are simple and personal: "I have been thinking about you and I miss seeing you." Warn the class not to open with a rebuke, and remind them of Jude's own order, compassion first, urgency where it is needed.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jude 3 establishes that revelation is complete. Teach it plainly: the faith was delivered once for all, and no new revelation is being given today (Galatians 1:8–9; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). Do it graciously, since many sincere people have been taught otherwise.
- Jude 5 and the examples that follow show that people once delivered can be destroyed. Use this alongside last week's work in 1 John to keep assurance and warning together, and against any doctrine of unconditional security.
- Do not build doctrine on the sources behind Jude 9 and Jude 14. Jude uses material his readers knew; what the Holy Spirit affirms through him is true, but that does not canonize the literature he alludes to. Say this clearly if a class member asks about the book of Enoch.
- Diotrephes is easily turned into a weapon in a local disagreement. Keep the discussion on the sin the text names, which is loving preeminence, and let each person apply it to himself rather than to an absent brother.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Daniel 3–6 · Psalm 144–146 · John 11:28–12:8 · Revelation 1–2

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